

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 PM-04 L-03 NSC-05 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02

EB-07 AID-05 COME-00 TRSE-00 FEA-01 INT-05 DOTE-00

HUD-01 CIEP-01 OMB-01 CG-00 NEA-10 AF-06 /082 W

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R 222052Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9914

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR VE ENRG JA

SUBJ: JAPANESE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO VENEZUELA

SUMMARY: DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO VENEZUELA, JAPANESE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA CALLED FOR A "NEW ERA" IN ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN JAPAN AND VENEZUELA, BUT DID NOT REACH ANY SPECIFIC AGREEMENTS WITH THE GOV. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT PEREZ OFFERED TO PROVIDE JAPAN WITH A STEADY SUPPLY OF PETROLEUM, FUKUDA NOTED POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES WITH THE QUALITY OF VENEZUELAN PETROLEUM AND TRANSPORTATION ARRANGEMENTS. HE LAMENTED THE "CONFUSION" CREATED BY THE HIGH PRICE OF OIL, BUT HOPED THAT "CORDIAL DIALOGUE" WOULD AVOID CONFRONTATION. END SUMMARY

1. TAKEO FUKUDA, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN, MADE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO VENEZUELA ON AUG 17-20. FUKUDA WAS ACCOMPANIED BY HIS WIFE AND BY A 20-MAN DELEGATION CONSISTING OF PARLIAMENTARIANS, FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS, ECONOMIC ADVISORS, AND JOURNALISTS. ALSO ACCOMPANYING HIM WERE A GROUP OF RAILWAY AND SUBWAY CONSTRUCTION EXPERTS, SOME OF WHOM REPORTEDLY WILL ASSIST THE GOV WITH

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THE CARACAS SUBWAY PROJECT.

2. IN HIS ARRIVAL STATEMENT ON AUGUST 17, FUKUDA SAID THAT HE HAD COME TO VENEZUELA TO "INAUGURATE A NEW ERA" IN ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND JAPAN. HE STATED THAT AS A PETROLEUM CONSUMING NATION, JAPAN WISHED TO MAINTAIN A DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION WITH OIL-PRODUCING NATIONS. FUKUDA MET WITH PRESIDENT PEREZ, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS, THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, COORDINATION AND PLANNING, MINES AND HYDROCARBONS, AND FINANCE, AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE INVESTMENT FUND. NO OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE WAS RELEASED AT THE END OF THE FUKUDA VISIT.

3. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE ON AUGUST 20, FUKUDA REPORTED THAT A VENEZUELAN-JAPANESE JOINT COMMISSION WOULD MEET IN OCTOBER IN JAPAN TO DISCUSS PETROLEUM ISSUES AND TO CONSIDER WAYS TO STRENGTHEN COMMERCIAL, CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. FUKUDA ALSO INFORMED THE PRESS THAT ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT PEREZ HAD TOLD HIM THAT VENEZUELA COULD PROVIDE A CONTINUOUS SUPPLY OF PETROLEUM TO JAPAN, THERE WERE OBSTACLES TO SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT. FUKUDA EXPLAINED THAT THE QUALITY OF VENEZUELAN PETROLEUM MIGHT NOT BE SUITABLE FOR JAPANESE REFINERIES AND THAT JAPANESE SUPER-TANKERS COULD NOT GET THROUGH THE PANAMA CANAL. HE SAID THAT THIS SUBJECT REQUIRES CLOSER STUDY BY OIL EXPERTS.

4. A JOURNALIST ASKED FUKUDA WHETHER JAPAN SIDED WITH THE "BELLIGERENT ATTITUDE" OF THE U.S. ON THE OIL PRICE ISSUE OR WHETHER JAPAN "RESPECTED THE SOVEREIGNTY" OF THE OIL PRODUCERS. FUKUDA REPLIED THAT JAPAN AS A CONSUMING NATION NATURALLY PREFERS LOW OIL PRICES, "THE LOWER THE BETTER," BUT JAPAN RESPECTS OPEC DECISIONS AND PREFERS "CORDIAL DIALOGUE" TO CONFRONTATION.

5. COMMENT:ALTHOUGH A JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL ACCOMPANYING FUKUDA TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT THE VISIT WAS "VERY SUCCESSFUL" WE DO NOT SEE MUCH EVIDENCE THAT ANYTHING REALLY CONCRETE EMERGED FOR EITHER COUNTRY, WHICH MAY HAVE DISAPPOINTED THE GOV. AS AN EXERCISE IN GOOD WILL, THE VISIT PROBABLY FULFILLED EXPECTATIONS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PETROLEUM, MINISTERIAL VISITS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975CARACA08804
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750292-1101
From: CARACAS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750824/aaaaauku.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 JUL 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <17 JUL 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: JAPANESE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO VENEZUELA SUMMARY: DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO VENEZUELA, JAPANESE DEPUTY
TAGS: PFOR, ENRG, EGEN, OVIP, VE, JA, (FUKUDA, TAKEO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006